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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002463

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: FALLUJAH CITY COUNCIL SELECTS MAYOR

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Henry S. Ensher. Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY. The Fallujah City Council selected Sheikh Dhari Abd Alhadi Yousif al-Ersan as mayor in a June 7 session. Four candidates put their names forward for the job (two were absent from the meeting); Sheikh Dhari received 16 of 17 council votes cast by secret ballot. The selection process led to complaints (and a subsequent walk-out) of four Fallujah residents who complained that the new mayor should be directly elected by the people, not by its council members. The city council also welcomed Brigadier General Salah (Deputy Commander, Public Order Brigade) in his new role as City Police Chief, and noted that the weekly Ministry of Industry and Minerals-led Monday reconstruction meetings would be merged with the regularly scheduled city council sessions. END SUMMARY.

MAYOR OF FALLUJAH: SHEIKH DHARI

¶12. (C) In a well-organized and succinct city council session, members elected Sheikh Dhari Abd Alhadi Yousif al-Ersan as mayor. Four candidates put their name forward for the city's top job. The council's Vice-Chairman, Qassem Mohammed Abdulsttar al-Jassem, opened the meeting by speaking to the issue of democracy as a principle of governance. He noted that the term democracy was a Greek word, which meant that people were responsible; "they are in charge." Iraq's citizens had suffered greatly "under the darkness" during the last years, but now needed to work toward unity. They could not have separate parts of Iraq, he declared, "we are a whole." Qassem made the following points:

--Fallujah is part of Iraq. It cannot be divided from the country.

--The city had suffered considerably in the past, but there was now an opportunity for the city to take advantage of the new situation: "we must fight against all forms of corruption, crime and bad works."

--Fallujans needed to work toward freeing many detainees.

CANDIDATES MAKE SPEECHES

¶13. (C) Qassem, in his capacity as Vice-Chairman of the council, oversaw the mayoral election process. The four candidates' names had been listed on a nearby board; the two present -- Sheikh Dhari and Engineer Farouq Abdu Mohammed -- were offered the floor. Dhari spoke only briefly, flagging his background as Colonel in the Iraqi Army. Dhari also stated that he came from a main tribe in the region, the Zobai (Al-Zawbaa).

¶14. (C) Farouq Abdu Mohammed, in contrast, spoke at length. He highlighted that he had graduated from university in Baghdad with a chemistry degree, served as a lieutenant in the Iraqi army, and now was as a businessman. Farouq offered a lengthy set of additional points on his civic priorities: security as top concern; police from the area; more jobs; sewer, hospital and school repairs. He stressed that Fallujah could serve as a bridge to the rest of Iraq as a "model city."

¶15. (C) The other two candidates (Samir Rasheed and Jassem Mohamed Abid Al-Subayhe) did not attend the session; Qassem read a short biography on each. Four residents in the audience interjected that Fallujah's mayor should be elected by the people of the city, not selected by the council. This would represent real democracy. Qassem reiterated that the stated selection process by council members would stand; the objecting residents then quietly left the room in protest.

16. (C) Council members, numbering 17 present, cast secret ballots on slips of paper. Sheikh Dhari

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received 16 votes, Farouq Abdu Mohammed one vote. The new mayor spoke briefly, thanking those present for their trust in him. He said he did not want to talk a lot about himself but looked forward to working with the city and enjoying success in all areas.

17. (C) The mayor's position in Fallujah has been vacant since Operation Al-Fajr (November 2004). Filling this vacuum in city governance constitutes an important step toward moving Fallujah into a more sustainable self-governance and reconstruction mode. In private conversations with PolOff, several local residents have expressed support for Sheikh Dhari.

18. (C) Comment: The Coalition's interaction with Sheikh Dhari has been limited. He only recently became active in city governance issues with his selection in April as one of the tribal representatives on the council. His transparent selection in an open session should help bestow legitimacy among city residents. The new mayor has a big job ahead of him in Fallujah's challenging security and reconstruction environment. This effort will require not only local support and political swagger, but also personal stamina. Effective interaction with the Provincial Council in Ramadi will also be key to Sheikh Dhari's long-term success, changing Fallujans' traditional go-it-alone mindset.

19. (U) REO HILLA, REO BASRA, REO MOSUL, and REO KIRKUK, minimize considered.

Jeffrey